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ABSTRACT

This paper profiles the Academic Writing Center at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, which, although influenced by writing centers in American universities, is less dependent on tutorials. The university writing center has only three academicians for 13,000 students, and most of their time is spent teaching how-to-do-it workshops and classes (up to 180 participants per session). The paper lists the seven main topics of the basic course--each 3-hour session has elements of both lecturing and workshop, and participants are university students representing all levels from first year to Ph.D. in all 25 university disciplines. In all teaching, two workshop elements are included. (1) on-the-spot writing and sharing; and (2) commenting on short model examples of student writing by the students and the teacher. Illustrative examples of students' research questions and teacher comments are included in the paper, as is an outline of what good academic language consists of. The paper discusses why the simple teaching sequence is such a useful teaching strategy and points out three advantages of using model examples in large class workshops. Teaching large classes and workshops for writers of major projects is an invaluable, economical, and visible introduction to academic writing which leaves many tutorials unnecessary. (NKA)

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Fewer Tutorials and More Large-Class Workshops in the Teaching of Academic Writing -- The Use of Model Examples in a Workshop Pedagogy.

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The following article is based on the authors' presentation at The Writing Lab Conference in Bloomington, Indiana (april 1999). In it we present and exemplify one of our favourite teaching sequences, and the rationale behind it.
In the article we have kept the transparencies we use in our teaching to show not only the content but also the way they are used in practice.

1. A PROFILE OF ACADEMIC WRITING CENTER IN COPENHAGEN

First we'd like to acknowledge that there wouldn't be any writing centers in Europe (we have only two in Denmark) if it wasn't for the American writing research, teaching and tutoring. Most of what we know about the teaching of writing we have learned from you Americans -- our inspirational sources have been Peter Elbow, Bereiter & Scardamalia, Beth Neman, Muriel Harris, Booth, Colomb & Williams and others.
But for a number of reasons we do a lot less tutorials than you seem to do in the U.S. For one thing, tutorials are time-consuming and expensive: We are only three academicians in our center, there are over 13.000 students at the faculty, and besides, European writing centers are not in the habit of employing student tutors. Instead, we spend most of our time teaching how-to-do-it workshops and classes (up to 180 participants at each session). The students get no credit for attending, yet they flock to our 3-hour workshop courses, each featuring one aspect of academic writing, thus rendering many tutorials unnecessary. We believe we have found a low-cost/high-effect/popular-with-students-and-administration formula which may work for some of you, too.
In addition to our basic course, we arrange thesis writers workshops with approximately 200 participants per year (i.e. 50% of all), oral presentation workshops and courses for teachers in the teaching and supervision of writing. We do only about 100 tutorials per year.
In order to reach as many students as possible, we write and produce a considerable amount of instructional material on academic writing: Textbooks, pamphlets, (online) handouts, software.

Main topics in "The Research Paper" -- The Basic Course (7x3 hours)

The main topics of the courses are listed below. The content of the courses is what we consider basic knowledge and skills for an academic writer.

1. Criteria: What is a good research paper?
2. Get started: Ideas for the writing process
3. The research question as the organizing point of the research paper
4. The research paper as one argument
5. Sources, theories and methods and how to handle them
6. Structure and elements of the research paper
7. Academic language, editing and physical format

Every 3-hour session has elements of both lecturing and workshop. Participants are university students representing all levels from first year to Ph.D., from all of the 25 disciplines

(institutes) of the faculty. Their ages range from 19 to 60, most are in their twenties. (As you may all well know, in Europe you may go straight from high-school (Danish: gymnasium) to university, as we do not have colleges. Admittance into Humanities at university requires a high grade-point average from gymnasium (though up to 20 % are admitted without those requirements -- and these students are the ones we mostly see at tutorials).

2. TWO EXAMPLES OF THE USE OF MODEL EXAMPLES

In all our teaching, we include as much as possible of these two workshop elements:

(1) On-the-spot writing and sharing (which we will not go into in this paper).
(2) Commenting on short model examples of student writing by the students and the teacher.

We will exemplify the use of model examples on two topics, first, the teaching of the qualities of a good research question, and secondly, the teaching of the qualities of good academic language.

It is not so much the content as the teaching strategy we focus on here. The aim is to demonstrate for the students -- and make them articulate -- what they think works well in academic writing.

Example 1: Two students' research questions.

Research Question from a 30 Page Paper: Communication in Network -- Film, MA Programme (note *)

It is the cultural importance of computer-mediated network communication I will discuss in this paper. I will examine the characteristics of the computer network and its potential as a new type of media. In the paper I will analyse the general characteristics of network technology and describe a series of the ways in which networks are used at present.

After the preliminary methodical deliberations, I will reveal how theories about mass media research have problems characterising the forms of communication in computer networks. Instead will be mentioned a series of newer theories about computer-mediated communication. After that, a pragmatic perspective on networks will be constructed, and a number of concepts that can be used in the analysis of social organisations within computer networks will be presented. Finally, system development is touched upon, which is perceived as a cultural process during which the structure of the computer network takes shape.

(Note *: The following text examples are translated from Danish by the University Translation Center, as close as possible to the style of the original texts).

Research Question from a 60 Page Paper: The Computer Game -- Film/Psychology, Bachelor-Project, 2 Authors

Problem formulation

It is our impression that the debate about computer games rests upon a series of problematic premises. Prejudices and faulty logic also characterise parts of the research, the very purpose of which ought to be to eliminate the worst of the wrong conclusions. One particularly hardy

but unfortunate perception of the relation between players and games presumes that an unambiguous causal link exists between theme and reception. Accordingly, one overlooks the child's media skills as well as the fact that the computer game cannot in any meaningful sense be considered in boxes, but is a dynamic, reflective play-culture.

We seek to establish an understanding of the games as a cultural phenomenon with a particularly close link to the central narrative of post-modern society. This is done by answering the following main questions:

How can the computer game be described as a medium? What is the special appeal of computer games? How can the relationship between players, computer games and post-modern society be described?

We invite our workshop participants to comment on:

Which of these two research questions would you rather base a paper on?

What are the academic qualities – or lack of same – represented in the way these two research questions are put?

When we use these examples in class, our students are not in doubt -- the second example shown comes in as a clear winner -- none opts for the first one. The audience of our US-colleagues (approx. 30 attended) at the Bloomington conference responded similarly to these two examples -- number too was labeled "much more manageable" and "a scientific inquiry, whereas number one is more like a broad abstract", and number one looks like "an outline of what you are going write about which leaves no room for new insights as you write", "probably written after the paper was written".
After hearing and discussing the students´ comments, we always render our evaluations (and possible corrections). Our evaluations most often serve the function of systematizing and appraising the students´ statements so that they may experience their ability to formulate criteria of quality and principles for academic writing. These are our comments to these two specific texts:

Our Comments to the research question of "Communication in Network"

what exactly is the problem?
has an observation ("problems with the theories") -- but it is not highlighted
much paraphrasing will be necessary
broad and generalising -- seems to contain much material, theories and concepts
the subject gets lost and the theories and concepts remain
relations between the parts are unclear (how is the system development process related to "the cultural importance of computer-mediated network communication")
lacks precision ("theories have problems", "a series of newer theories" "a number of concepts")
subjects are "mentioned", "presented" and "touched upon" -- does not imply in-depth treatment
resembles a knowledge-telling strategy (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Our Comments to the research question of "The Computer Game"

It has
an observation
a problem
a focus
"something has been overlooked" -- the students will set things straight
the promise of a new theoretical understanding
(seemingly) thorough knowledge of the state-of-the-art
clear relations between parts
good integration of the subjects of film and psychology
a knowledge-transforming strategy, i.e. combines the known and the new

---

"The Computer Game" earned the highest possible grade, and "Communication in Network" earned an above average grade.

After reactions -- first the students', then ours -- to the specific texts, we will give some characteristics of what generally makes a good research question -- to be discussed, reacted to, further exemplified etc.:

What Makes a Good Research Question

Does it address a problem within the field? – that is, something:
- *unexplained, unresolved*
- *underdeveloped*
- *not* explained/dealt with in *"the way it should"*

Is it aiming for knowledge transformation?
Is the main content high on Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, that is asking *why* or *how*, (not just *what*)?
Does it help to structure your paper as an argument?
Does it reflect the breadth/narrowness of your material?
Does it relate to or involve the use of theories, concepts and methods of your discipline?
Is there *one* clear main question (+ subquestions)?
Is the main question open?
Is it posed in precise words, clearly marked in the introduction, and is it short, preferably less than 10 lines long?

Thus we go from the specific examples to the general principles for academic writing.
Example 2: Academic language

The aim is to make the students articulate and discuss various qualities of academic writing.

Our instruction here is: Please answer the questions:

What are the qualities of the academic writing here?

What do you find good about it, and what -- if anything -- would you want changed?

An Example of the Language in a Master Thesis in Music: "The Dance House Movement in Hungary."

In connection with this thesis it is -- of course -- the groups "imitators" and "users" who it is most important to keep an eye on. My intention by going through Stekert's four categories was to clarify that the dance-house movement and the state ensemble s use of the folk music from Transylvania are merely two different ways of using the original. That the different uses are both strongly politically and aesthetically loaded, I hope, the previous chapter will have made clear. But I do not think that necessarily has to lead to the interpretation that one type of music is *correct* while the other is *wrong*. My purpose with this chapter is, thus, *not* to judge whether the dance-house movement s music is better, more correct or more "authentic" than Gulyás composition. My purpose is solely to examine how the ideals of the dance-house movement are reflected in the music and as a result of that differs from the music of the state ensembles.

3.1.2. Sound

As discussed in the section above, one of the most significant features that distinguishes a composition like Gulyás from the original, is the way it *sounds*. The thing that struck me the first time I heard "Széki muzsika", after having had my ears dipped in dance-house and original folk music for a good six months, was the -- in a classic sense -- technical superiority with which it was played. Each individual tone sounds different than the original. Precisely this fact, that to a greater degree it is the *sound* that distinguishes the music from Transylvania from the state ensembles than it is the exact melody, pitches and harmonies, is mentioned by Owe Ronström in his article about the dance-house movement[156].

This master thesis attained the highest possible grade. But nevertheless the language used here brings up a lot of doubt in the student audience whether this degree of popularization and almost colloquial language is admissible, and many objections are discussed, so too at our session at the NWCA-conference. Here especially the word "dipped" evoked some pros and cons.

Interestingly, in an audience of 28 university teachers at one of our faculty courses, very few objected to the language in this example, indeed most found it good in spite of the complaints mentioned. This shows that many students take a more conservative stance than their teachers, and many students have misconceptions about academic writing that may readily lead to a more stilted and unnecessarily complex style of writing than their teachers in fact ask for.

These are our comments to the text:

Qualities of the Language in the Excerpt from "The Dance House Movement in Hungary".

Pluses:

The text

focuses

prepares the reader

explains the status of the information
sums up
employs paragraphs and headlines
uses typographical effects
employs keywords ("sound")
contains examples and comparisons
has an objective use of "I"

Minuses?
instances of a too personal style
instances of the spoken language ("of course", "dipped")

At our workshops our general statements about academic language are eventually shown on a transparency and passed round as a handout:

Good Academic Language is

Scientific
- investigating (main speech act)
- professionally acceptable
- objective, neutral
- precise, unambigious, explicit
- coherent
- metadiscoursive
- timeless

Clear
- understandable
- simple
- well structured
- cohesive

Correct

We emphasize three aspects:

1. The language should live up to scientific demands and standards.The students should learn to metacommunicate, as metacommunication is an important feature of scientific writing. We will return to the parallel between the metacommunication in the students´ commenting on the model examples at a writing workshop, and the presence of metadiscourse in scientific texts as well as in good papers written at university and college.

2. Academic language should not be unnecessarily abstract and hard to read -- as Ray Smith from Bloomington put it: "The students should learn to articulate a complex position without adding to it´s complexity". (Ray Smith: Handout from conference in Copenhagen, nov.1998)

3. The language should be correct.

The principles: Teaching strategy when using model examples
Based on years of experience of using model examples, we have arrived at the following sequence:

Teaching Sequence for the Use of Model Examples

1. The students read and comment on the text in class
2. The teacher summarizes the students' comments/criteria on the blackboard
3. The teacher comments on the example, and the criteria underlying the comments
4. The teacher gives guidelines and concrete instructions on "How To Do It".

When using examples of student writing in a workshop context, we observe the following guidelines:

Guidelines for the Use of Model Examples

The more examples, the better
Examples of good academic writing are generally more instructive than examples of bad academic writing
The teacher gives guidelines for contructive comments
The teacher comments *after* students' comments
The teacher appraises the students' comments
The teacher highlights the positive qualities of the texts
The teacher connects from the model examples to general criteria for good academic writing

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3. THE TRAINING OF METACOMMUNICATION
Why do we find the simple teaching sequence such a useful teaching strategy? We have three good reasons:

The first reason is that *it entails analysis of text rather than description*. We are not just telling the students how to do it, but they are actually learning by doing. It is analogous to how you might teach other subjects such as for instance literary analysis, namely by doing and demonstrating it on texts in class, not by just instructing the principles.
Secondly, we will expect the student to *internalize academic standards and criteria* more fully by voicing their own comments out loud in class.
And thirdly and maybe most importantly, we are training the participants to do at the workshops exactly what we want them to do in their own assignments, papers and theses, namely *to metacommunicate about the what, why and how in their sources and in their own research paper*.

Metacommunication
As shown by a number of investigators, a university paper works better and is likely to get a higher grade if it contains a fair share of metadiscourse (see among others Connor,1990, Cheng & Steffensen, 1996). And it is easy to understand why. The skill of metacommunication is central to writing in any further education, so it should be central in teaching to write. Metacommunication shows that the writer is capable of relating to

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- Science itself and how it is presented and thus commenting directly on the work(s) of others (that is how the students handle for example theories, methods, consequences, implications, historical and contemporary significance) -- as one university teacher put it: "Papers that are just acceptable are about *the substance* only, whilst the really good papers are about *science* too".

- The writer's own text – that is how and why the text is composed as it is.

- The reader of the text -- the metadiscoursive signals make the the text easier to read, overlook and comprehend.

Three Advantages of Using Model Examples in Large Class Workshops

We consider large class workshops and here especially the commenting on model-examples a teaching strategy with a number of advantages, measured in terms of the pedagogy, the economy of a writing center, and the visibility of the writing center:

Pedagogy

Most important, the large classes allow us to show the participants that individual problems are general challenges and that the articulation of those criteria aids internalization. The students experience how not just one writing consultant or one teacher, but a general academic audience of their peers prefer to see academic problems are examined and presented. Besides that -- in hearing suggestions on how to cope with text problems -- there is a lot of inspiration and concrete ideas for the students on how to handle their own text even if their specific text has not been discussed. It is training in metacommunication, and that is what (some of) the students need if they are to perform that crucial skill. And it is the conciousness and verbalization of criteria they will need to evaluate the writing of others and indeed their own writing.

Furthermore an overwhelming majority of the students likes our pedagogy. In the students' written evaluations on our courses, a recurrent comment is that they can hardly get enough concrete examples, and even if we have discussed 20, some will request even more examples.

Economy

We save precious time and money by limiting costly one-on-one tutoring to those students who claim to have special and individual problems. And even those students with special problems are often easier to help when they know the general principles of academic writing from our large class courses.

Visibility

Drawing a crowd of 180 will be spoken of around campus. If the problem is raising money to get the center running this is a way writing centers can be seen clearly in the landscape of the university.

Discussion, perspectives

You might argue that our pedagogy is not quite appropriate at American universities. Your students might in some respects differ from the European university students: They may be younger, some may come from a social background which makes it harder to integrate them in the academic society, many of them are NNS- and ESL-students. And you may argue that Composition 101 takes care of it all. All of us may argue that tutorials are what we love to do,

and indeed do best. But teaching large classes and workshops for writers of major projects we find is an invaluable, economical and very visible introduction to academic writing which leaves many tutorials unnecessary. It provides the participants with a chance to discuss and comment among themselves, a chance to see how their peers write and what their criteria are, a chance to verbalize and voice their textual observations. It also makes that public and explicit which at times may remain private and implicit in tutorials.

If you have comments or questions, please do not hesitate to mail us:
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Peter Stray Jorgensen: stray@hum.ku.dk

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